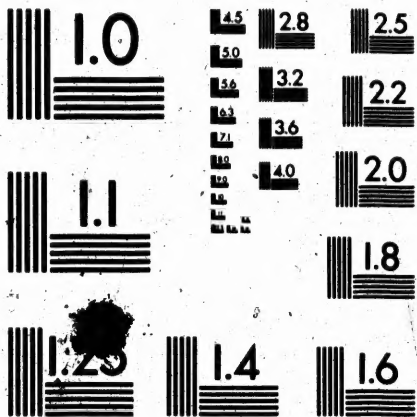




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NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
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D3444 Our Pulpits and their Creeds.

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DO OUR PEOPLE BELIEVE

WHAT OUR PREACHERS PREACH?

—BY—

"ABNER DEAN."

PRICE, TEN CENTS.

Toronto :

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR

BY W. G. GIBSON.

1881.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY



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Do our People Believe what our Preachers Preach ?

The merry chimes of Christmas-tide have once more rung out upon the air ; our Churches are once again bright with Christmas boughs ; another year has been gathered into " God's great garner of the Past " ; and Orthodoxy for another year has been preached from every pulpit in our land.

And, as our spiritual teachers are wont, at this season, to meet together upon a common platform of supposed Christian unity, and to point, with somewhat of conscious pride in duty done, to the rich vintage which has crowned their labors in the " Vineyard of the Lord " : does it not become us, all of us, as reasonable, God-fearing, conscientious men, to pause upon the threshold of the New Year, and to ask ourselves in all sincerity, and with due respect to our clergy, what this thing called Orthodoxy—(whether Roman Catholic or Protestant), this series of ecclesiastical formulas, ostensibly believed by all, though inwardly disbelieved by three-fourths of our thinking men, and utterly at variance with the authentic teachings of Christ—what all this really means, and what it is doing for our country and our age ?

Never in any period of the past has Orthodoxy been more active than in this year of Grace, 1880. In Britain and on the Continent the restoration of old Cathedrals goes on apace ; both in Europe and America the building of Cathedrals and less pretentious temples never ceases. In Toronto alone there are considerably more than one hundred Churches (the majority, we may remark, carrying

heavy mortgages); and every little village of our land boasts of its half dozen places of worship. Theological Colleges, where young men's minds are made to run into a narrow groove, hollowed out by some old-time worthy years and years ago, are springing up every where around us. The various societies for the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crystalized and fossilized according to the peculiar tenets of each individual sect, have never been more vigorous in their propagandism. With the Bible in one hand, and the rifle and rum-flask in the other, Britain christianizes and demoralizes the dwellers in the East; while America, tearing in pieces her most solemn Indian treaties, offers in their stead the Cross of Christ to the dusky warriors of the West.

And, indeed, within the past few years, Orthodoxy, not content with its former methods, has adopted more vigorous and sensational tactics. The old and steady modes of our forefathers have proved unsuited to a more rapid and fastidious age. The world offering its attractions of spectacle and upholstery and music, the Church must cater to the public with the same bill of fare; and it may be observed that those very sects whose platform of secession was simplicity in worship, who thirty years ago looked upon a stained window as a Popish relic, and an organ as an "unholy thing," are the very sects who to-day are preparing the most elaborate menu for the popular palate.

In summer, festivals and pic-nics and afternoon excursions appeal to us in glaring type for money "to aid the cause of Christ," which, in plain English, generally means to help some particular congregation build an edifice that shall excite the envy of all surrounding denominations. The camp-meeting also woos from the city's dust and heat to the pleasant grove, where religion may be imbibed in homœopathic doses, with the kindly accessories of lake breezes, music, and the fragrant smoke of a cigar. Fortunately the camp-meeting, pure and simple, as it existed every where in the good old days, and as it lingers still in

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some remote sections, is so prolific of evils and so totally unnecessary in a land where almost every corner lot has its Church, that even the most orthodox are beginning to see that to resort to "Nature's leafy temple" for the worship of God, is decidedly "inadvisable," to say the least. In winter the bazaar holds sway, that contrivance whereby under the guise of religion, money is eked out of the pockets of those who too often can but ill afford the outlay, supplemented very frequently by a resort to that most questionable of all ecclesiastical schemes for raising the wind, the election contest or raffle, in which the party spirit of the voters or the feverish excitement which is the sure precursor of gambling, is utilized by our clerical friends for the service of God.

The "Revival," that season of excitement in which enthusiastic natures (mostly, we may remark, of youths and women) are wrought upon by surrounding circumstances and the impassioned utterances of the pastor, seems, however, with certain sects, to be a perennial resort, whenever interest in the cause exhibits symptoms of flagging; and if a Hammond, or an Ives, or a Moody—who will tell you at the end of a series of meetings just exactly how many souls have, through his humble efforts, been plucked as "brands from the burning"—opens a revival campaign, the heart of the dissenting evangelical is indeed glad.

Within the past two or three years, moreover, the old ecclesiastical organizations have been endued with fresh vigor, and new unions and leagues of all kinds have been called into being. Evangelical alliances, which accurately map out what doctrines are God's and what are of the Devil, what dogmas are necessary to salvation, and what are unimportant; Young Men's Christian Associations, whither our goody-goody young men resort—too often, it must be confessed, with the ulterior motive of winning the favor of some presiding dignitary in their business or profession; Sunday School Conventions, in which Church doctrines are rendered as little distasteful as possible to the

youthful palate, and in which the open confession is made that to the children and not to the adults must the Church look for its adherents of the future ; Pan-Presbyterian and Pan-Anglican councils ; Ministerial Associations, in which for the nonce sectarian bitterness is laid aside : all these, and many other agencies, have arisen within a comparatively brief period, for combining the power of the churches and the clergy into a solid phalanx of unprogressive Orthodoxy. Quite recently, indeed, the intensely interesting and unusual spectacle has been witnessed of proposals sanctioned by, and actually coming from, High Churchmen, towards a union of Christendom (in which, of course, each sect will insist upon its own peculiar tenets being that union's foundation) ; or, as it has been said, in view of the new and greater danger threatening all the creeds from an enlightened public opinion, the priest, upon whose head apostolic hands have been laid, no longer scruples to fraternize with the "mere dissenting exhorter," about whom lingers no trace of divine unction. In a word, everywhere, in every Church, while the foundations are honey-combed with scepticism, greater and greater efforts are being made to buttress up the tottering walls and bind together the broken timbers of that greatest obstacle to true Godliness, true liberty and true charity : the popular religion of the day.

And, now, we would ask : what are the fruits of this system of religion ? what is it doing ? what does it pretend to do ? Its mission, we are told, is twofold : first, to make men more moral and happy in this life ; and secondly, to save them from an endless Hell in the next.

As to the first of these, we would ask whether professing Christians, i. e., those who claim to be (and, as far as we can judge, are) converted, are more moral, more honest, more godly, more happy than their heterodox friends ? Is the ordinary minister of the Gospel a truly happy man, with a semi-divine calm ever upon his brow ? Is he not, () the contrary, just as fretful, just as selfish, just as un-

happy too frequently as, and usually a great deal more bigoted than, you or I? Does the young man who is a consistent member of a Church, or of a Young Men's Christian Association, have any advantage in obtaining a situation (except, perhaps, from some fellow-member) over him who believes—and has the courage to express his convictions—that the whole system of popular faith is one gigantic and noxious fraud? How can a man be truly happy in the firm belief that the God in whom he trusts and calls his Father is He who says: "I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh?" that the future abode for ~~ever~~ of most of His nearest and dearest ones on earth is the Hell where "the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched"; and that he will be powerless to cool their parched tongues by even one drop of water? How can he be happy in so degrading his God-given reason as to trust to a "scheme of salvation" which violates the fundamental principles of Eternal Justice, and to accept the verbal inspiration of a book out of whose pages may be proved every conceivable doctrine from Universalism to Calvinism, and from Puritanism to Roman Catholicism, a book which, with all its beauties and goodness bears, in its obscenity, contradictions and palpable errors, its human origin stamped upon every page?

Are our orthodox friends, in fact, better citizens and better men than those of us who are heterodox? Are they less anxious about "laying up for themselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and thieves break through and steal"? We appeal to our readers as sensible, reasonable beings, to say what appreciable effect upon the lives of our friends and neighbors have these doctrines which are enunciated Sunday after Sunday throughout Christendom: the inspiration and consequent infallible authority of the Bible; the existence of an endless Hell and a personal Devil; the dogma that creed and not character saves; original sin derived from the Fall of Adam; that most reprehensible and perfectly unscriptural

doctrine of the Trinity; the divinity of Christ (an idea which Christ, in his authentic words, not only did not countenance, but repeatedly condemned); that monstrous outrage upon God's attributes, the "scheme of salvation by vicarious atonement"; and many others: what have all or any of these to do with the morality of our people? Nothing; less than nothing! In the first place, the majority of thinking men do not believe these doctrines. In the second place, all the practical teachings of Christianity, *i. e.*, those which relate to our lives and conduct (charity, honesty, chastity, and many others) are acknowledged by our clergy themselves to be entirely distinct from dogmatic theology, and are accepted as binding by all men, irrespective of religious belief. In the third place, we assert—and challenge contradiction—that the heterodox, sceptics, freethinkers, or whatever they may be termed—those, in a word, who reject what they consider mere accretions to the purity of true religion—are more moral, more honest, more happy, and decidedly less narrow-minded, hypocritical and bigoted, than professing Christians. We speak not of those who, on the one hand, have entered Churches simply as a means to a worldly end, or of those who, on the other hand, through indolence and brutishness, affect to disbelieve everything. We speak of the conscientiously orthodox and the conscientiously heterodox; and we assert again that, as far as this world is concerned, the latter—those who believe a creed whose foundation stone is Hell and whose crowning glory is a judicial murder, to be evil and not good—are better, nobler and happier men than those who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"! To take only one instance: Who are more God-fearing, noble and philanthropic than the members of the Unitarian Church, with such names up on its bead-roll as a Channing, a Wendell Phillips and a Longfellow: a Church denounced in our pulpits as worse than heathen and utterly outside the pale of Christian brotherhood?

What Communion has furnished New England in the past with grander statesmen and poets and philanthropists; what Communion holds within its fold more of the godliness and purity and culture of New England to-day, than this same Unitarian Church?

But, say our orthodox friends: Is not the morality of our land and age due to Christianity? We reply: It is due to Christianity partially (not wholly, however, for man, in a long course of developement, must of necessity work out a system of morality; and, moreover, among the sublimest moral utterances in the world are those of heathen philosophers); but that it is due to *Orthodoxy* or the *dogmatic Christianity* of to-day we utterly deny. Our Christian morality has to do with the life of Christ; and in just so far as dogmas have been ignored and this bright example followed out and lived up to, in just so far has the morality of Christendom been pure and good; and in just so far as dogmas and creeds have been insisted upon as the essentials of religion, in just so far has Christendom become bigoted, hypocritical, cruel and debased.

As to the second mission of Orthodoxy, namely, that which reaches beyond the grave, God alone can judge. Whether He who "careth for the sparrows" will damn to all eternity the creatures of His hand, *simply* because they cannot believe what a minute fragment of mankind in a particular stage of the world's history chooses to call "*The truth of God*"; whether it will be the blessed privilege of the saved to behold from the crystal battlements of Heaven their loved ones on earth writhing in the torments of an endless Hell; whether God so resembles a demon as, merely for His own glory, to create a world to be condemned at the outset by the very first man's sin, our finite minds cannot determine. No echo comes back from the silent tomb; the curtain of the future is, in God's own good Providence, never drawn aside; 'tis ours alone to work and wait and trust our Father's pleasure. But certain we are of this, that if Orthodoxy be indeed true, and

"He who believeth not-shall be damned," then nine out of every ten of those around us in this Christian land must, even by their own shewing, be destined to a life of endless woe! We assert, therefore, that until it is proved beyond the shadow of a doubt—and not on evidence which would be at once rejected in every Court of Justice—not only that the very few expressions ascribed to Christ which breathe such dire vengeance are authentic, but, even if authentic, are divine utterances—until then, we cannot and dare not predicate the result in a future world of belief or disbelief of what is preached as His truth in this.

Until we know the unseen end, we can judge of ecclesiasticism and orthodoxy only from what the Church has been and still is upon this earth. And in all honesty and sincerity, we ask those who really think: What has ever been, and still is, the character of the Churches and the priestly class? Are they not, and have they not ever been, the great stumbling block in the way of all true progress, true liberty, true charity, true godliness?

The same verdict is written on every page of history: that those who have arrogated to themselves a revelation from on high denied to others, have ever proved themselves bigoted, pharisaical and cruel. Every oak-grove, with its sacred stones and white-haired priests, still whispers of the victims slain to appease the Druid's God. Every Jewish streamlet still murmurs of the day when its waters ran red with the blood of the young men and maidens, the old men and children, whom the "Chosen People of the Lord" hewed in pieces and utterly destroyed. The Colosseum, from whose terraced seats the rank and culture of the city by the Tiber gazed down upon the martyr struggles of the early saints, still stands an eternal witness to the relentless bigotry of a priesthood and a faith. From every valley of the Vaudois, from every Scottish hillside, from every Syrian plain still rises the wail of those whom the Church has followed to the death with its quenchless hate. Every dark and gloomy dungeon of the Netherlands, every "Witch

Elm" of New England, every ruined Aztec temple and Inca shrine, still in silent sadness bear record to a priestly love of power and blood.

Judaism, with its blood-stained altars and revengeful code; Mediæval Christianity, with its forged miracles and churchly maledictions, its intrigues and sordid avarice; Roman Catholicism, that faith which, changing only when forced to change, has saddened the whole world with its hideous cruelties; the Church of England, which, allied with kingly power, has ever opposed all true progress and the granting of equal religious and social rights to other creeds; American Puritanism, escaping persecution at home only to persecute abroad; Scottish Calvinism, that mysterious union of intolerance and metaphysical subtlety; the orthodoxy of our own day, placing beneath its ban him who has the manly courage to deny that it alone is the custodian of God's eternal truth—that orthodoxy which presumptuously arrogates to itself the destiny of my soul and yours: *always, everywhere*, the Church has been and is still the same, persecuting, bigoted and tyrannical when powerful; mild and Christ-like only when its fangs are drawn: as if God had designed to shew mankind on every page of history the same great truth, *that those who claim to themselves a pretended revelation from on high, ever belie their claim by the fruit which that pretended revelation bears.*

And the Churches are to-day the same as they have ever been: "semper eadem" is their watchword still. Whatever has ultimately prevailed and has proved to be for the benefit of the race: *that*, orthodoxy has persistently opposed. The progress of science, from Columbus and Gallileo to Darwin and Lyell; the advance of free thought and speech from Socrates to Luther, and from Luther to Herbert Spencer, has been but one long struggle with the orthodoxy of each particular age. Astronomy, Geology, Navigation, Printing, every art and science which was destined to broaden and deepen man's ideas, has been at

one time under the ban of the Church. Taking its stand upon the ground of a divine revelation and of an absolute unerring authority upon all points of religion, science, government and social life, inch by inch has orthodoxy fought against the march of civilization and liberty. Inch by inch also has it yielded ground, until now, abandoning the outworks, it makes its final stand within the walls of "infallibility in essentials only," leaving "minor questions" (which for ages have been deemed essentials) to be decided by private judgment. Every reform has in turn been the object of bitter denunciation and persecution; and then, when opposition became futile, of hearty support. Slavery as a divine institution found no warmer champions than among the clergy of Britain and the South, until, finding public opinion to be anti-slavery, these same clergy discovered that the Bible condemned this "nefarious traffic." The liquor trade found no more ardent adherents than the clergy of England (where indeed "the Bible and beer" has been an oft-repeated election cry), until, popular opinion demanding a change of front, a change of front has been made, and the same Scriptures—almost the identical texts—marshalled *against* the use of liquor as were formerly employed in its defence. Geology, at first sneered at, then denounced as "science falsely so called,"—because forsooth its conclusions did not harmonize with the ancient interpretation of Holy writ—has in these latter days been taken by the hand as the ally of the Church and the expounder of those very texts (the creation of the world in six days, and others) upon whose authority the science was at first proscribed. Popular suffrage in Britain; popular education (apart from priestly influence) in England, France, Lower Canada, the United States; popular rights *everywhere*, have ever felt the weight of churchly anger and malediction.

And to-day, if the Churches had the power, they would, solely on their peculiar interpretation of certain passages in a book which they are now beginning to acknowledge is

not verbally inspired, deprive free men of their religious, political and civil rights. Has not every Methodist pulpit in our land resounded with ungrammatical denunciations of those who dare indulge in what their consciences tell them are harmless recreations? Have not men who (whether rightly or wrongly) have not been able conscientiously to support such prohibitory legislation as "The Dunkin Act," or "The Scott Act," been held up to many a congregation as winebibbers and abettors of the liquor traffic? Have not certain Puritanical sects striven to impose, under pain of ecclesiastical wrath, miniature "Blue laws of Connecticut" upon the community? Have not the simple-minded electors in many a Quebec parish been forbidden by their priests to vote according to their political proclivities? Have not the clergy in England insisted upon their strict legal right to exclude the dead from the parish church-yard, simply because of their unchristian intolerance towards their dissenting fellow-subjects? Has the Church of Rome ever renounced her claim to absolute and universal temporal power? Is not the Church of England to-day opposing the clearest wishes of the people in the matter of "marriage with a deceased wife's sister," almost solely upon the ground of a couple of Levitical texts, whose interpretation is extremely doubtful? Has not every religious magazine in the English tongue anathematized those great and good men who have sufficient clearness of vision to perceive that not without sacrilege may a sinless God be accused of deeds a tithe of which would destroy for all time the moral character of a sinful man, simply because a record, written by no one knows whom and no one knows when, describes Him as crafty, double-dealing and delighting in blood? Are not our children in Sunday school and elsewhere taught to regard Paine, Channing, Renan, Strauss, Froude, Arnold, Mill, Ingersoll and her upon whose grave of yesterday not England only but the world casts loving wreaths, as marvels of wilful perversity, nay, more, too often of actual

wickedness, although the denouncer may not have read one word of the writings of the denounced? Dare a man in this nineteenth century and on this American continent proclaim himself a Christian, according to his own interpretation of Christianity, without drawing down upon his head the thunders of a miniature Vatican, and practically debarring himself from social preferment? May a minister of the Gospel boldly step out of the ranks and say: "I can no longer hold these God dishonoring doctrines, and I will not earn my bread by a living lie;" nay, more, can a minister of one denomination quit its communion and unite himself to another without attracting to himself full many a shaft of clerical malice? (Bishop Colenso, Dr. Dollinger, Dr. Thomas, of Chicago, and others much nearer home, are examples in point). Through whose influence and by whose sanction are freemen denied the right of giving evidence in open court, simply because they will not profess to believe what in their heart they do not believe?

But we thank God that the signs of the times are upon us, and already the hill tops are brightened with the dawning sunlight of a grander day. Men are beginning to ponder over and weigh those words which so incessantly are uttered in their ears; they are beginning to read the Bible for themselves and gaze into the face of Nature, that grand old Nurse, who sings to each one of us her varied song:

"Here is a story book
Thy Father hath written for thee,
Come, wander with me, my child,
Into fields as yet untrod,
And read what is still unread
In the wonderful works of God."

They are beginning to ask themselves whether "He who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain, who layeth the beams of His chambers in the waters, who maketh the clouds His chariots, who walketh upon the wings of the wind;" whether He can *really* be the God of whom our

preachers tell us. Men are beginning to ask how it is that the record of this faith of creeds has been but one long tale of blood; how it is that those very nations which have been most orthodox, most ecclesiastical, most firmly convinced of the possession of divine truth (as Spain, Austria and the South American republics) stand as living monuments of bigotry, blood and failure? Whether, if the tree be so fair as it is said to be, the fruit can be so bitter; whether if the fountain be so pure, its waters can be so foul? They are asking themselves whether, after eighteen hundred years of preaching, the world of to-day, with its crimes and selfishness and woes, and its camp-fires of war lighting up every land, is one whit nearer the Kingdom of God than it ever was; whether Europe, standing with her hand upon her sword and boasting that two millions of armed men are ever ready to obey her beck, is a reassuring witness to the efficacy of the orthodox Gospel; whether the Bishops who voted in the House of Lords for the Afghan war, and the clergy in all the earth who (almost without exception) have upheld war as *sometimes* necessary, and blessed their nation's banner, blood-stained though it may have been: whether these men do *really* understand in their hearts the words of Christ uttered again and again *without the slightest qualification*: "Resist not your enemies; but whosoever smiteth thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also." Men are beginning, in a word, to ask themselves whether this orthodoxy, this system of dogmas is really what was taught upon the hill-sides of Judæa by Him who said: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself; on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

We have said: "they are beginning." We were wrong: *they have begun*. And to-day, in the face of evangelical alliances and Pan-Christian councils and Wells Island Sunday conventions and the other thousand and one agencies for the extension of orthodoxy, the people of

christendom are at heart heterodox. And our ministers know it; those of them at least whose minds are not cribbed, cabined and confined by prejudices, cannot fail to know that our Churches are permeated with latent scepticism, and the abiding faith of our people in the religion of their fathers is forever gone! The more one sees and hears, both within the Church and without, the more firmly must he become convinced, that society is at heart sceptical. It is useless to close our eyes to this obvious fact: it stares us in the face on every side. Our highest literature (outside of theology) is simply saturated with disbelief. The professions, the commercial class, the artisan element; all (except those forming the lowest stratum in our community) are, just in so far as they ponder over these great questions, and whether they attend Church or not, *at heart heterodox*.

Intelligent, God-fearing men in this last quarter of the nineteenth century do *not* believe in that dogma which has for ages hovered ghoul-like over the death bed of our race, the dogma of an endless hell whither nine-tenths of their friends are bound. They do *not* believe in infinite punishments for finite sins. They do *not* believe that the crude Jewish conception of God is still the true one, and that He who "numbereth the very hairs of our head" is He who said: "That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thy enemies, and the tongue of thy dog in the same." Neither do they believe that this discrepancy in the character of God can be explained away by a sophistry which denies that justice and mercy are forever unchangeable and unchanged. They do *not* believe that every word uttered centuries ago by prophets whose prophecies did not come to pass, must of necessity be eternally true. They do *not* accept as scientifically correct the confused and contradictory accounts of the creation given in Genesis. They do *not* believe in the fiction of the Garden of Eden and the curse of the whole human race, simply because our reputed ancestors partook of the fruit of a forbidden tree:—especi-

ally, moreover, as Jewish writers have always considered the narrative of the fall and the creation as merely legendary. They do *not* believe that every sentence, nay, every word, from Genesis to Revelation is absolutely and divinely true, however much it may outrage godliness and common sense—especially, moreover, as the Jewish Rabbins themselves do not acknowledge the *verbal* inspiration of the Old Testament. They do *not* believe that *belief* (i.e. a mere non-voluntary state of the mind), and not deeds, can save (as if a man could believe whatever he wished). They do *not* believe that God has struggled again and again (and frequently unsuccessfully) with a mighty demon called the Devil, totally unknown to Old Testament writers, and simply the creation of a superstitious after age. They do *not* believe that God's mercy is so handicapped that, in the plenitude of His goodness, He cannot forgive, without making a compromise with justice by means of a "vicarious atonement—a thing perfectly repugnant to Judaism, which never considered its sacrifices in any degree as "types and shadows" of a greater sacrifice in the future:—a vicarious atonement, we repeat, which satisfies justice by punishing the innocent and allowing the guilty to go free; a "scheme of salvation" in fact which, as has been said by Macaulay, resembles nothing so much as "a forged bond upon which is endorsed a forged release." They do *not* believe that one God can be three Gods and three Gods one God; or that the Athanasian creed is anything more than a clumsy, bigoted, metaphysical riddle. They do *not* believe that He who is "the same yesterday, to-day and forever," is continually changing His natural laws, simply to answer the petitions of individuals for material, and too often selfish blessings. In fine, they do *not* believe that a system of religion embraced by only a portion of even that fraction of the world which professes Christianity, a system, moreover, which denounces as unevangelical, heterodox and unchristian all who, with the same Bible in their hands, cannot agree with its particular interpretation

thereof; a system which, twenty-five years ago, insisted upon verbal inspiration, a personal devil, an endless hell, literal interpretation of all references to science in the Bible, the efficacy of prayer in material matters, unfailing perdition outside the narrow pale of each individual sect, but is now extremely chary of touching upon any of these points; a system whose essentials of yesterday are the non-essentials of to-day, and whose essentials of to-day will be the non-essentials of to-morrow; a system which *dare not* give reason play, but whose motto has ever been, "Reason is Satan's weapon; doubt not, simply believe;" a system which, to fill its Churches with even inattentive congregations, *acknowledges* that it must resort to every conceivable artifice to please the popular taste; a system whose priests do not profess to *teach* (much less to practice) the plainest precepts of Christ (e.g. absolute non-resistance, the giving away of all goods, the disparagement of riches); a system which has begotten religious hatred and sectarian bitterness the world over, and is to-day ready to rise into a flame in Germany against the Jews, and in Ireland under "the Orange and the Green;" a system which confesses that it exerts no appreciable effect upon the masses in our large towns, and says by the mouths of its teachers: "We must at all hazards reach the children, whose minds are not fully formed. Our thinking people do *not* believe that such a system comes ready-made from the hands of a pure and holy God.

The world, in this regard, is awakening like a giant from its sleep of ages. The latent doubters of yesterday are the avowed doubters of to-day, and the timid sceptics of to-day are the fearless infidels of to-morrow. Ecclesiasticism, (and all forms of orthodoxy, are, after all, but feeble imitations of Romish ecclesiasticism: the sects which are loudest in their cry of an "Open Bible," being just as tenacious as Rome herself that this Bible shall first be accepted as inspired, and then interpreted according to their own "ipse dixit")—ecclesiasticism, we repeat, is receiv-

ing such blows as have never been dealt it before. France, the most prosperous country in Europe, has, within the past year, expelled religious orders which in years gone by were wont to rule her councils. In Ireland, above the din of sectarian and class strife, due so largely to priestly teachings and priest-ridden ignorance, is heard the death knell of priestly rule. As a gentleman of great observation remarked the other day: "In fifteen years every theatre in Britain, the United States and Canada will be playing travesties upon the orthodoxy of the day; and the manager who takes the first step will make his fortune." And if this apply to England and America, with how much greater force does it apply to France and Germany, the two foremost nations of the continent? In the latter, not more than one fifth of the city populations pretend to attend Church; and of both countries, almost without qualification, may it be said that (save the clergy and those studying for the ministry), the educated and thinking classes regard our systems of orthodoxy (both Roman Catholic and Protestant) as what they really are: *a medley of oriental legends and mediæval mysticism, a libel upon the attributes of God and a parody on the teachings of Jesus Christ!*

But, it will be asked, shall men reject everything; is agnosticism the creed of the world, and materialism the goal of the race? We think not. Ninety-nine men out of every hundred *do* believe in a Supreme Ruler of the universe, who is cognizant of, and to whom we are responsible for, our acts and thoughts. Men *do* believe that this God is a Being whose every attribute is perfection, and whose Bible is the starry world above us, the glorious earth beneath us, and our consciences within us. Men *do* believe that this God, who, for some wise purpose has placed us here, is plenteous in mercy to all—whether Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free—who put their trust in Him, and live that the world may be somewhat better for their life. Men *do* believe "that this life, though not perhaps, not probably, our only sphere, is still an integral one and the

one with which we are meant to be concerned; and that man was sent on this earth to live on it, to enjoy it, to study it, to embellish it," and not to disparage it as a mere pilgrimage, a fleeting illusion of the Evil One. Men *do* believe that Christ (whether divine or human it matters not: we have His life) was given to us as our great exemplar reverently to be followed through all the ages; "the possibility of the race made real." Men *do* believe that "the glad tidings of great joy" are, in very truth, "Peace on earth and good will toward men;" and that the day, which though long in its dawning, will none the less surely appear, *will* come, when this Gospel—this pure Gospel of love to God and man, which Jesus preached, and not this spurious Gospel of creeds and Christ-worship which He so denounced), *will* "cover the earth as the waters cover the great deep." And men *do*, in their inmost hearts feel that the greatest obstacle to this glorious end is this very orthodox Christianity of our age.

Col. Robert G. Ingersoll himself, who wields a greater influence over the minds of the masses in America than any dozen living preachers, and whose eloquence has dealt Orthodoxy the heaviest blows of the day; even Ingersoll is not, as he has been unjustly termed by those who have never read his books, an atheist. He is simply an agnostic, one who does not know. But of this we may be assured, that, unless "pure religion and undefiled," consisting, we are told, in "caring for the fatherless and the widow and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world," be once more (and that right soon) proclaimed from our pulpits, this current of agnosticism will flow into the dead sea of avowed Atheism! *Why cannot our clergy see that Atheism and Materialism have no faster friends than the Christianity which they themselves are preaching?* The reaction *must* take place. God grant it be not as when the Goddess of Reason was enthroned in Paris, a reaction sweeping away our very belief in a God!

Can we who feel that this end is not to be desired, that

the race has a nobler goal than the pursuit of mere material good, that "God is and is the Helper of those who put their trust in Him": can we, in loyalty to ourselves, look calmly upon the present phase of this great problem or refuse to aid in its solution?

It is said by many who recognize the truth of what has been stated that it is unwise to take so solemn a step as the coming out boldly in antagonism to the religion of the day. We reply: "Truth knows no consequences." If Orthodoxy be false, we are recreant to God's Eternal Truth if we lend it our support. Is it manly, is it noble, is it Christ-like, for petty, selfish ends, to play the servile hypocrite, whilst error holds high carnival on the altars of our land? Can we, as lovers of God and humanity, listen with folded arms to these dogmas which we feel in our hearts are false and hurtful? Or, to take even a lower ground, would the key-note of any grand reform ever have been sounded, had those who felt within their souls the Truth, hearkened to the voice which whispered "Peace, Peace! when there was no peace"?

To each of those who still are wavering (and who is firm in his faith?) we would say: "In a spirit of earnest trust in God, read and ponder over your Bible; think, word by word, what it *really* says, and what our preachers *say* it says; test it by the test of God's great Bible, the Universe of Nature and your own soul. Read it, moreover, with the lamp of reason (God's greatest gift to you), not turned down, but brightly burning. Then ask yourself, 'can all this be wholly true?'" The more earnestly and truthfully you study, the more fully you let God's glorious light shine in upon your soul, the more sincerely you strive (with His help) to be a true man, the more clearly, we know and feel, will you come to see that in believing this Bible to be, above all other books, "*The Word of God*," the *one* revelation from on high, you are outraging the most sacred feelings of your being. We are persuaded, further, that the more diligently you search, extrinsically and intrinsically,

the ground upon which the inspiration and infallibility of the whole Bible rest, the more precarious will you find the foundation to be. We are convinced, lastly, that the more earnestly you meditate upon the *authentic* words of Him who spake as never man spake, the more incomprehensible will it seem how the Church could have changed into a system of creeds and dogmas and ceremonies that simple love to God and man preached upon the hillsides of Galilee.

The struggle may be long ; it *will* be hard ; but the end thereof is peace—not the fitful joy which comes from stamping reason beneath the feet, but an abiding peace which no man taketh away.

With the great world about us, it is a question but of a little time. The shadows are already lifting ; the dark mists of superstition are fast fleeing away.

“ABNER DEAN.”

Toronto, Christmas, 1880.

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